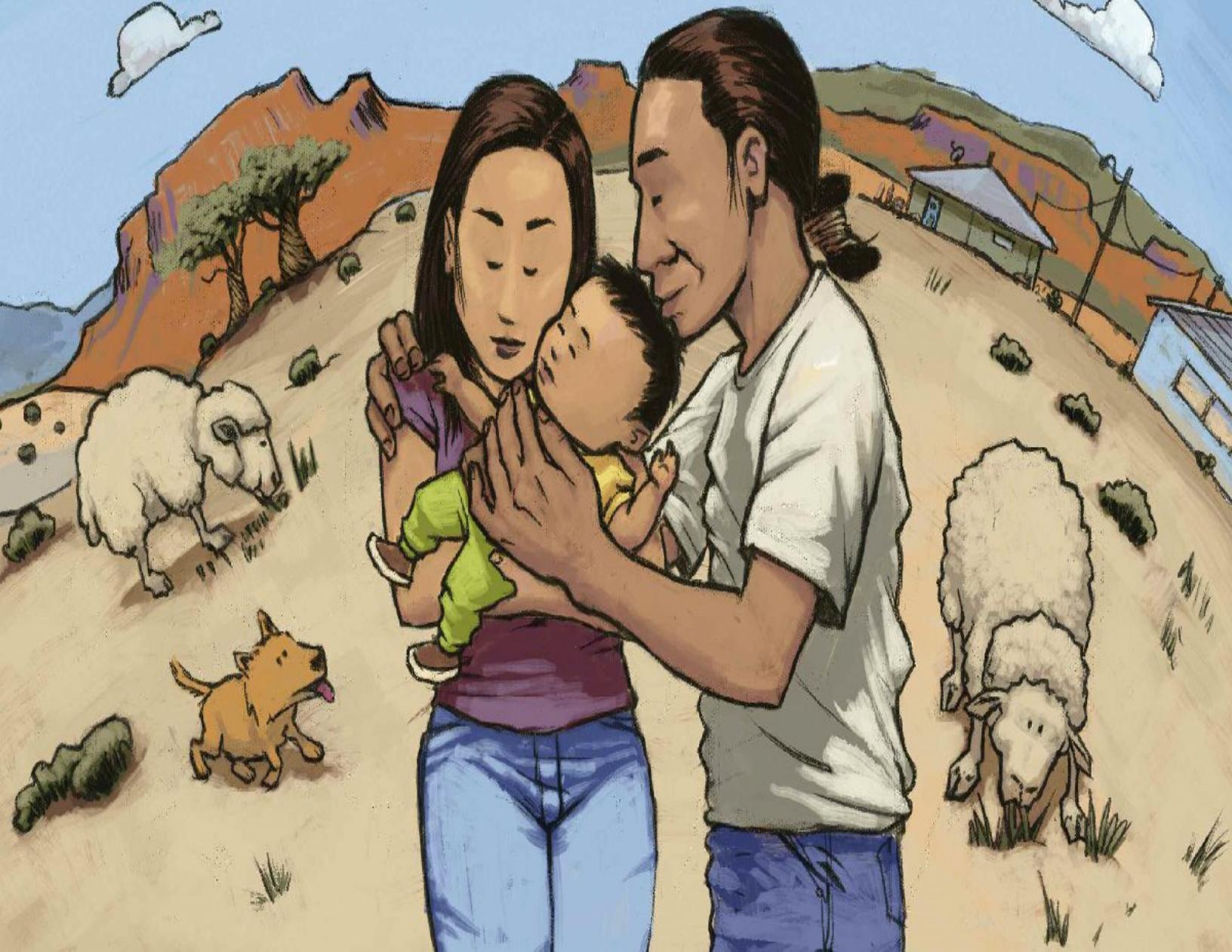


# FIRST LAUGH WELCOME, BABY!

Rose Ann Tahe and Nancy Bo Flood • Illustrated by Jonathan Nelson



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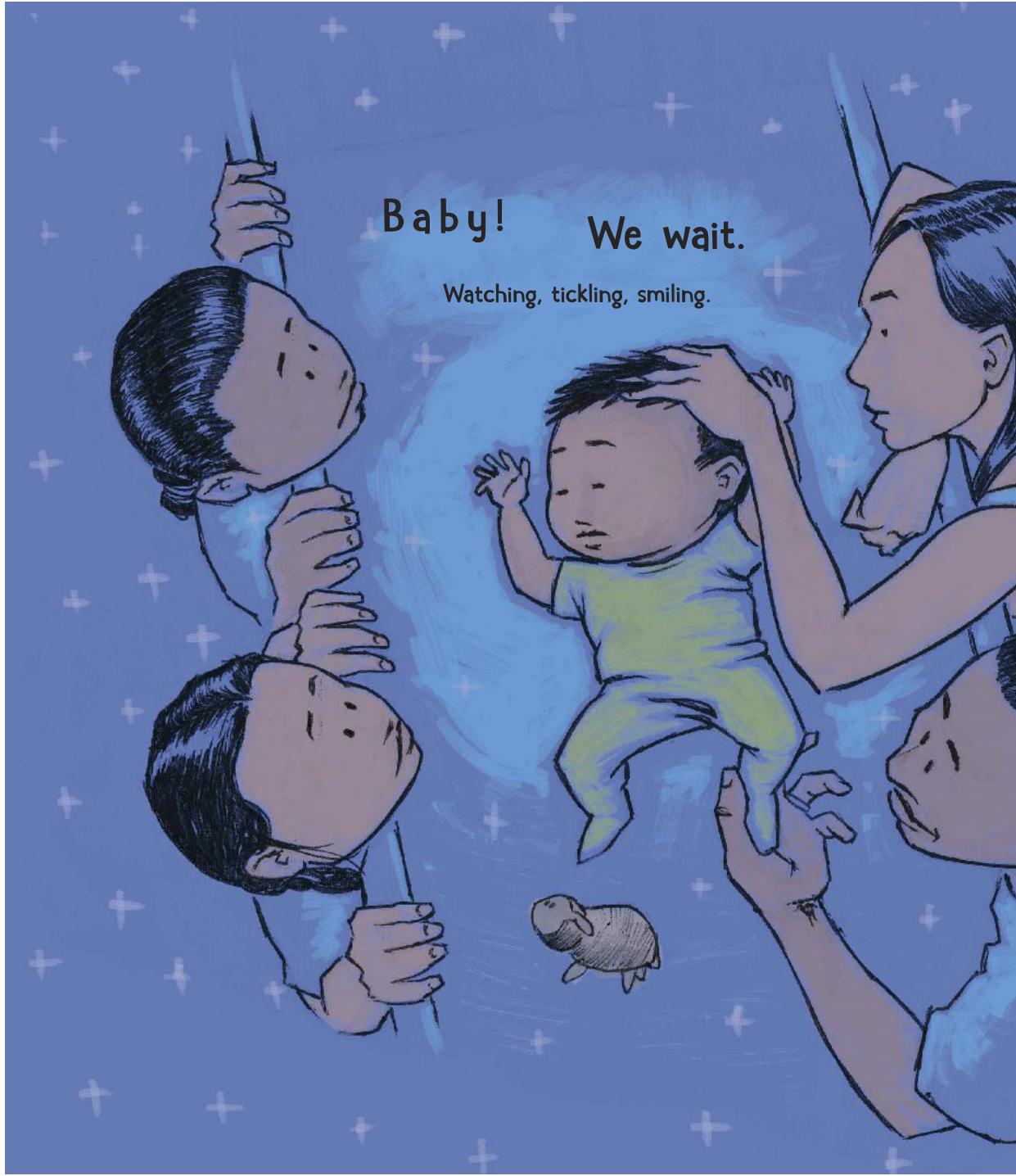




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Rose Ann Tahe and Nancy Bo Flood  
*Illustrated by Jonathan Nelson*

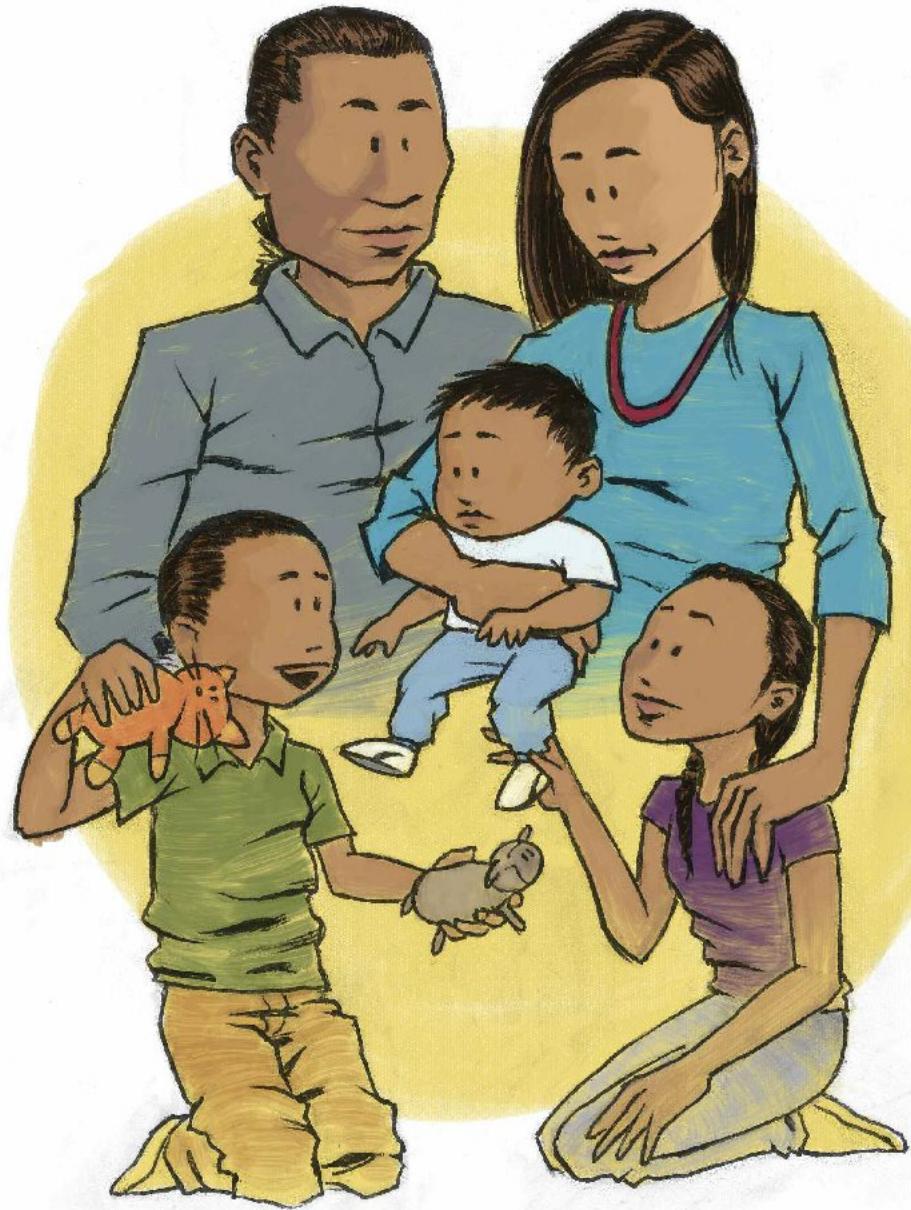
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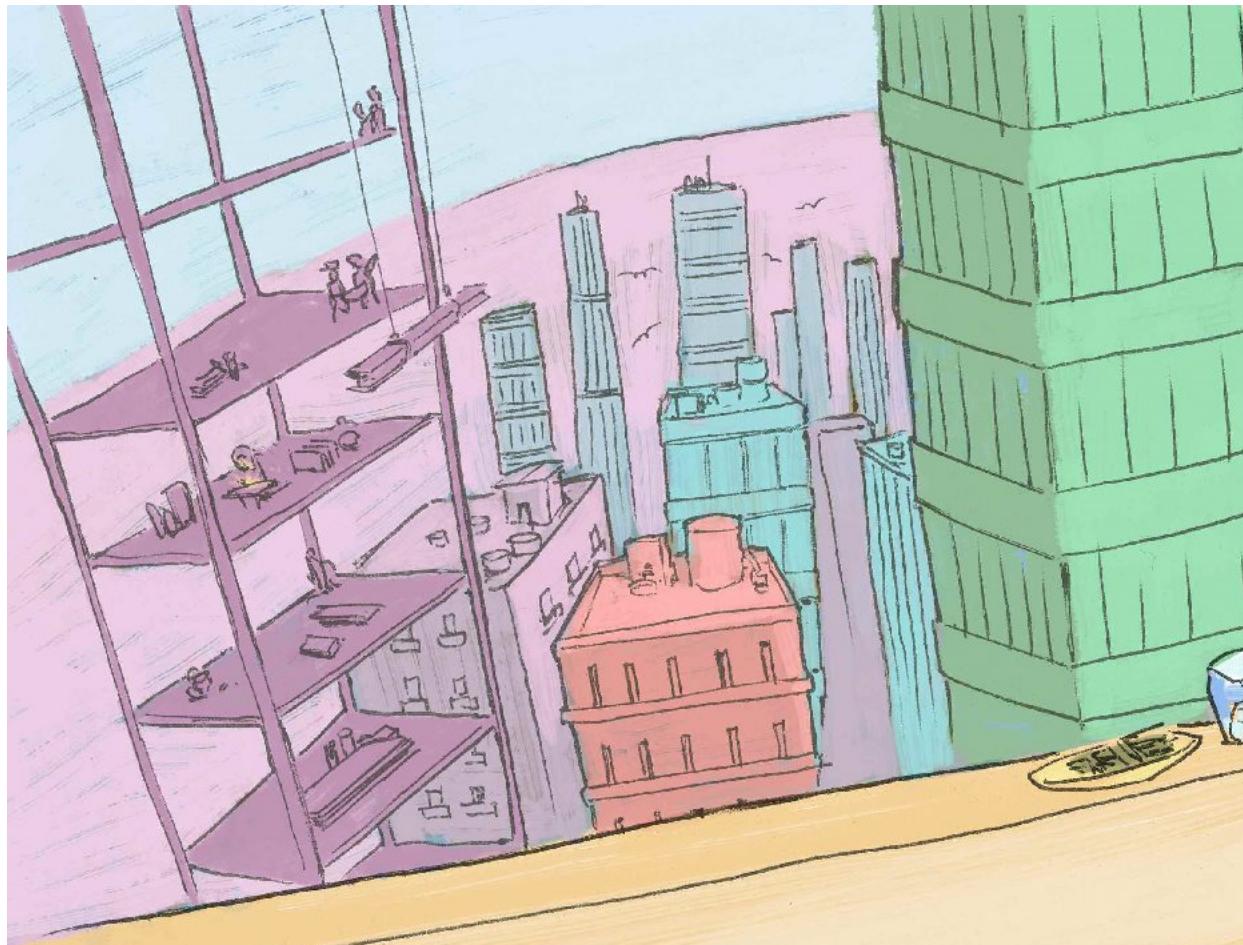


Baby! We wait.

Watching, tickling, smiling.

When will we hear your very first laugh?

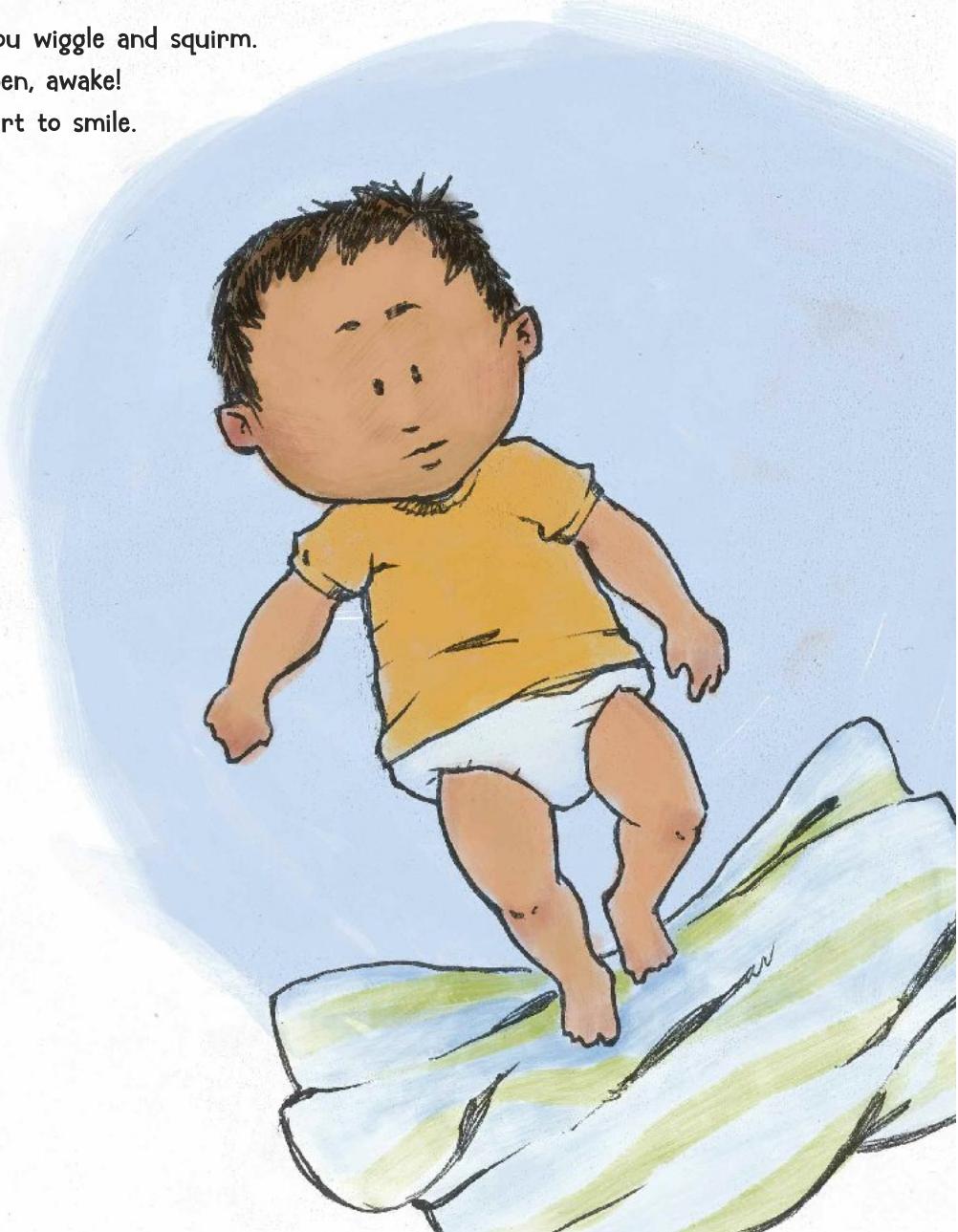


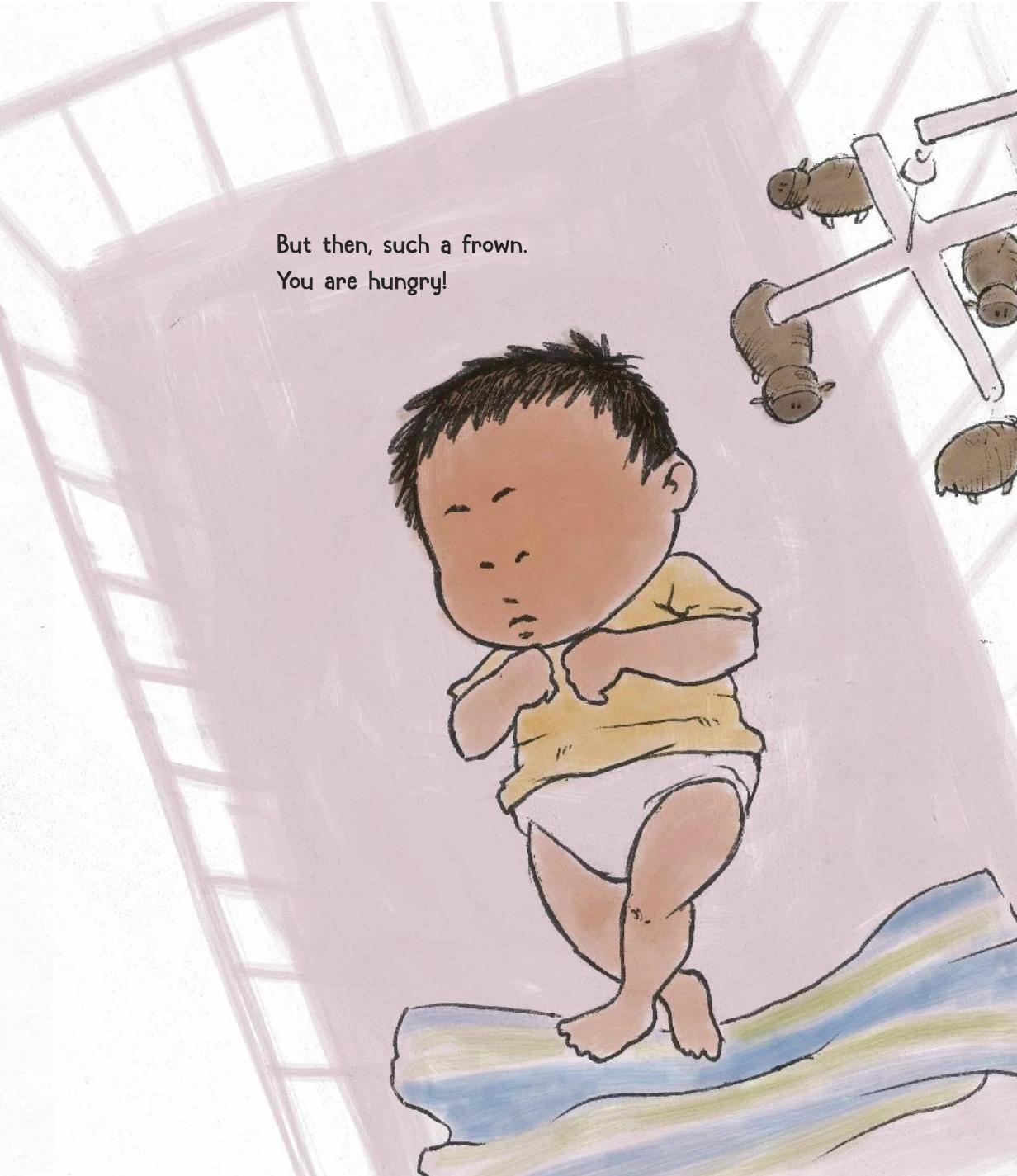


Baby, you nap in your crib.  
Grandmother, your nima-sani, tucks you under a Pendleton blanket  
in your skyscraper home in the big, busy city.  
All week long, Papa, your nhizh'e, works welding buildings of steel,  
while Mama is teaching children at school.



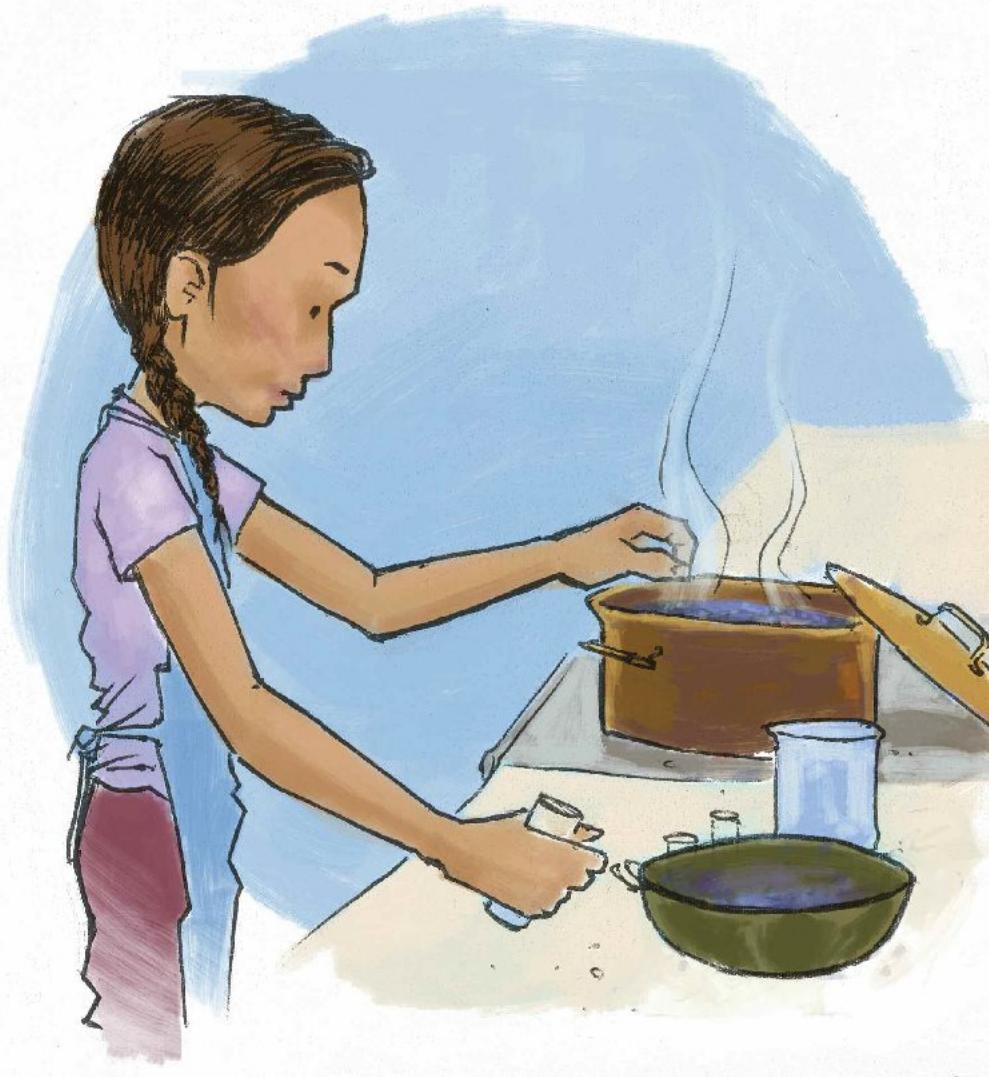
Soon you wiggle and squirm.  
Eyes open, awake!  
You start to smile.





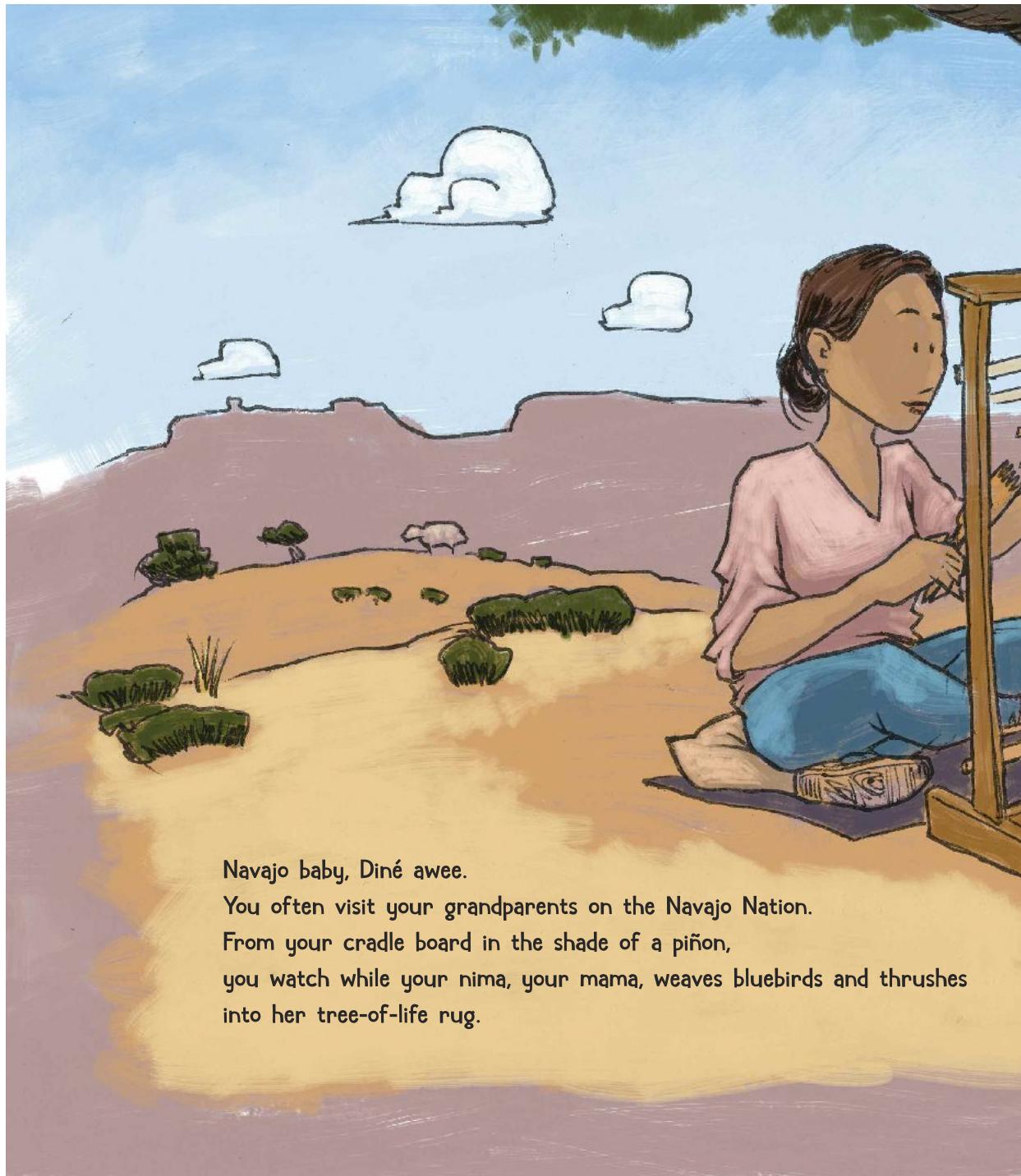
But then, such a frown.  
You are hungry!

Smells from the kitchen tickle your nose.  
Big sister, your nadi, sprinkles salt cedar ash  
into bubbling blue cornmeal mush.



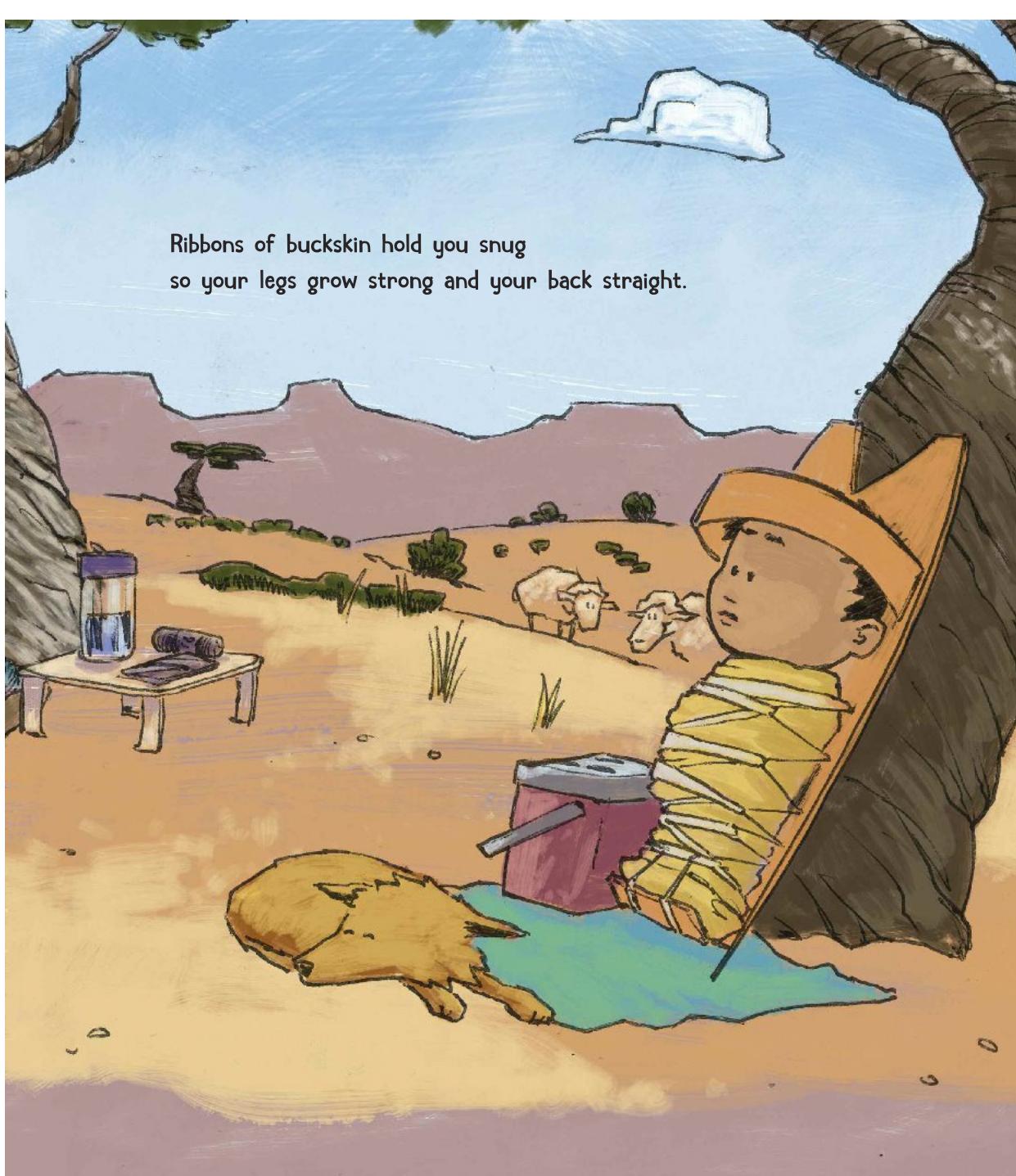


"Eat, little baby, fill up your tummy.  
Then will you laugh?"

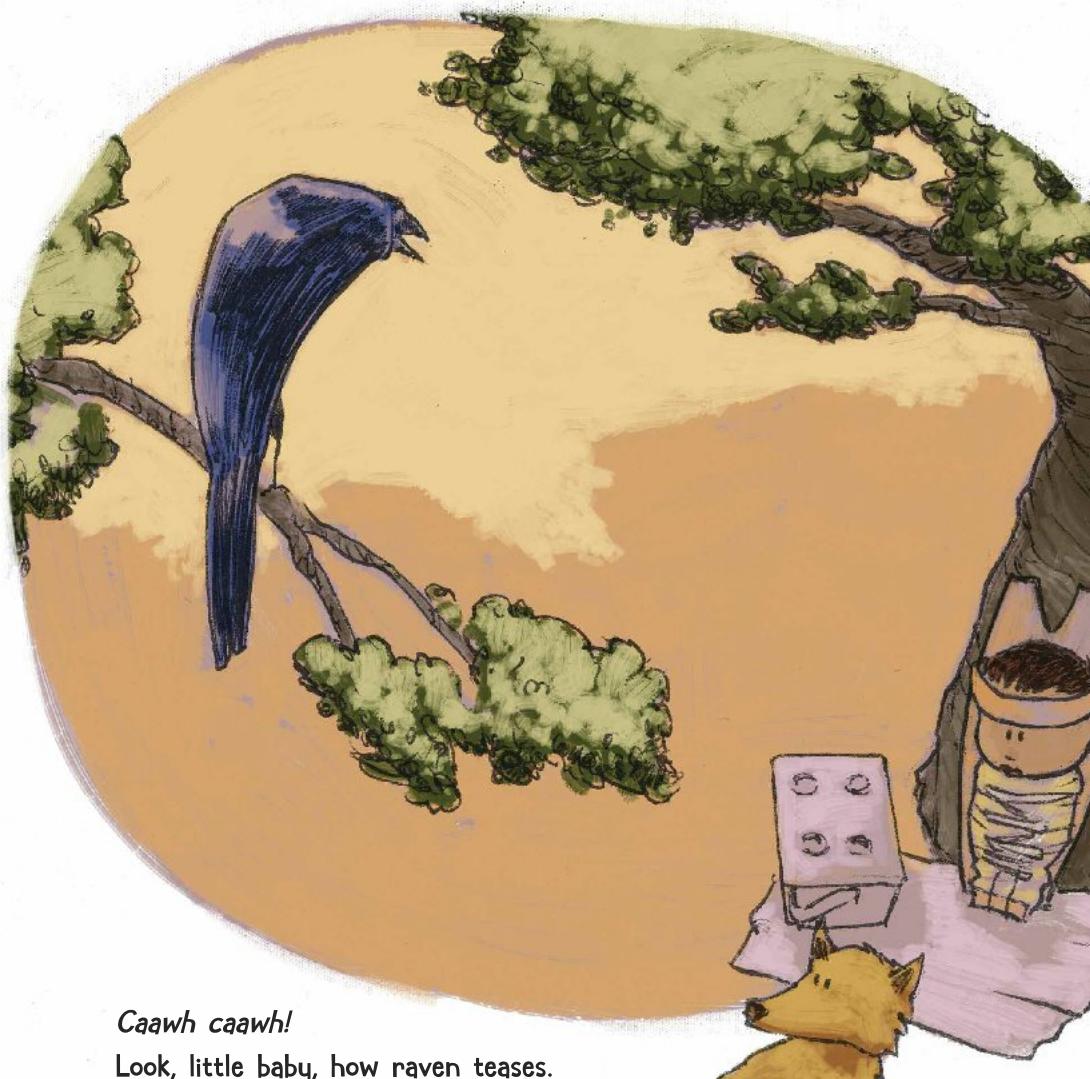


Navajo baby, Diné ahee.

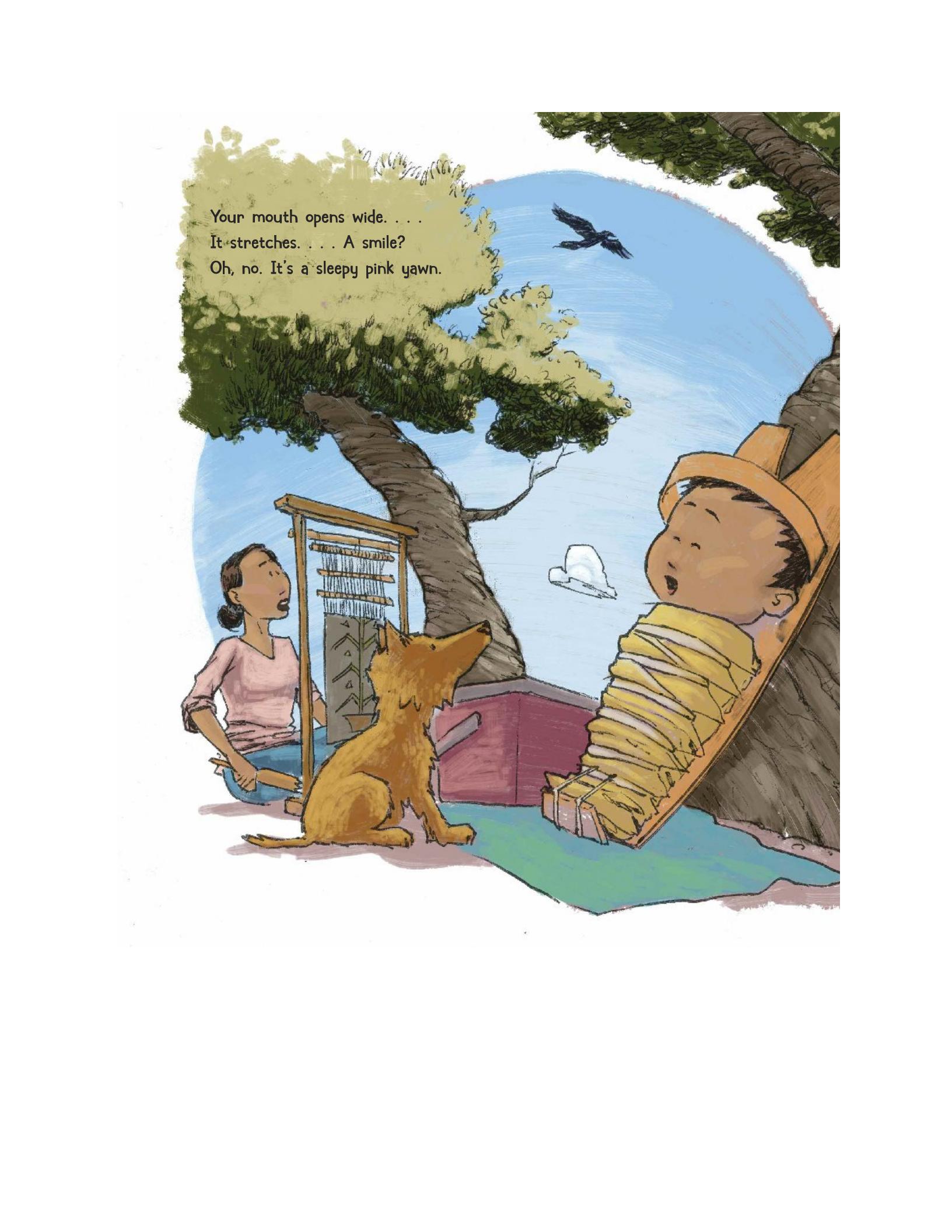
You often visit your grandparents on the Navajo Nation.  
From your cradle board in the shade of a piñon,  
you watch while your nima, your mama, weaves bluebirds and thrushes  
into her tree-of-life rug.



Ribbons of buckskin hold you snug  
so your legs grow strong and your back straight.

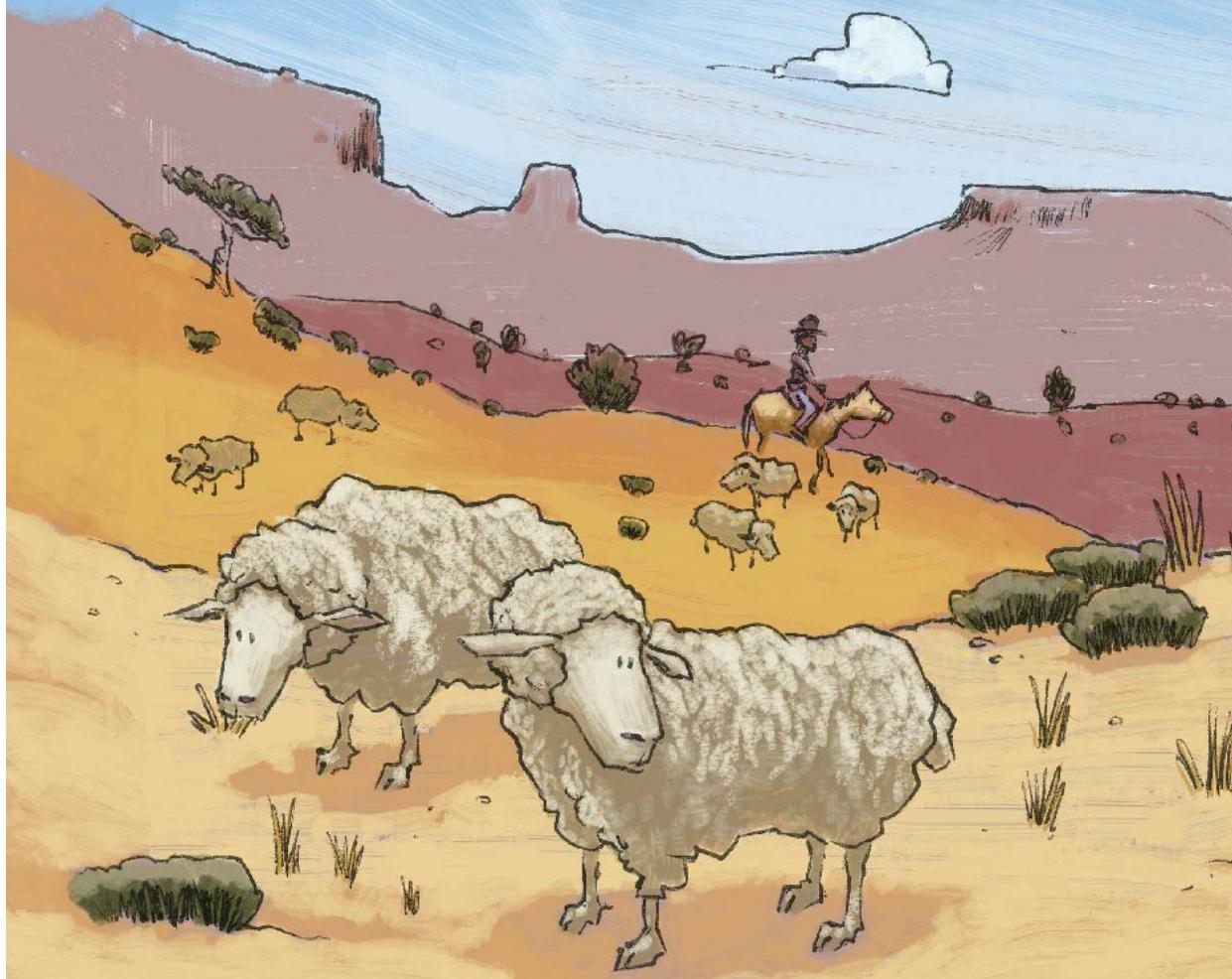


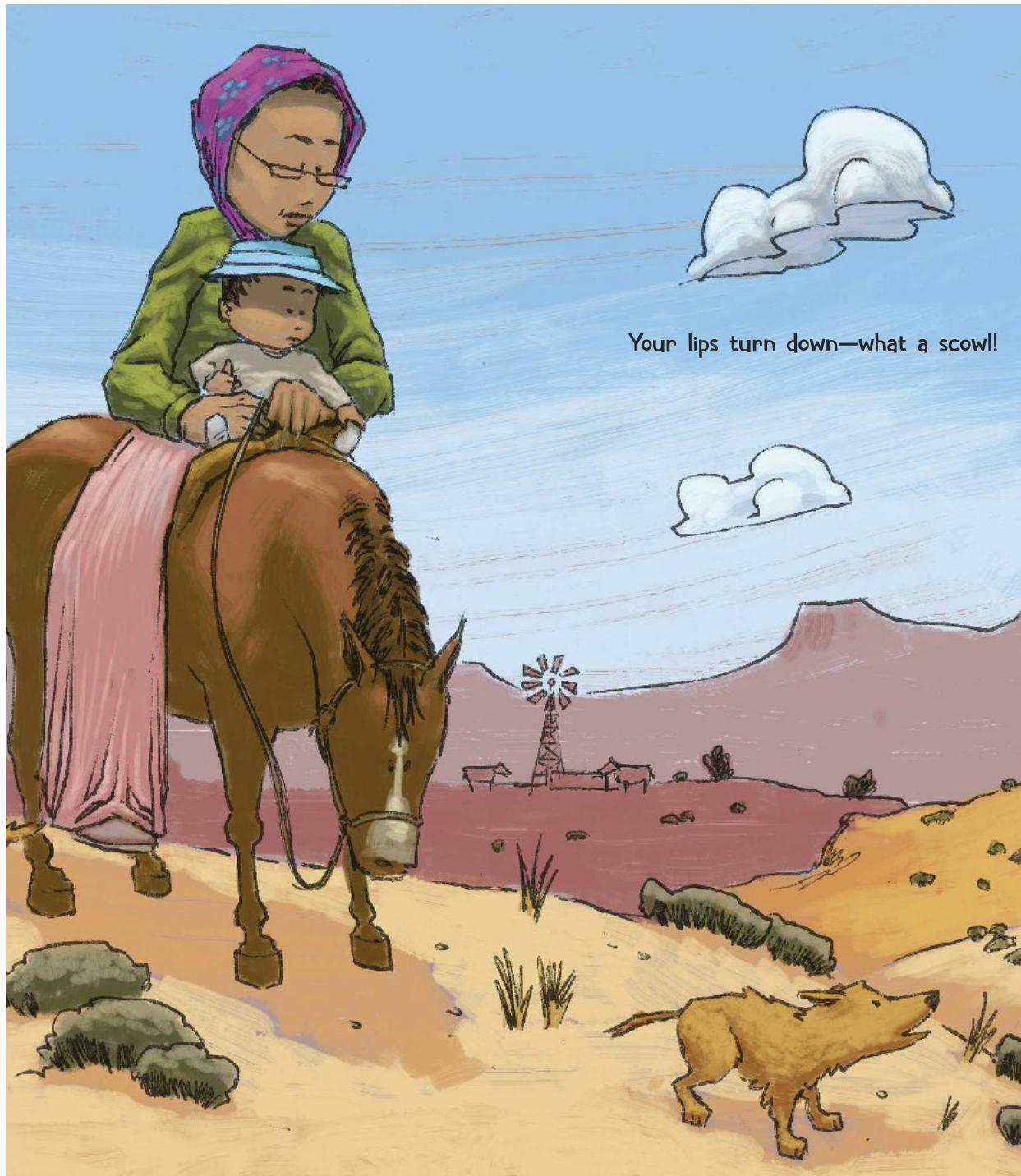
*Caawh caawh!*  
Look, little baby, how raven teases.  
Swoops low, then soars high.



Your mouth opens wide. . . .  
It stretches. . . . A smile?  
Oh, no. It's a sleepy pink yawn.

You ride on a horse across the red mesa,  
snuggled up front in Grandmother's arms.  
She shows you her sheep while tickling your chin.  
You grin.  
Uh-oh. Dogs bark. Coyotes yip and yowl.  
Little fingers curl around Grandmother's hand.

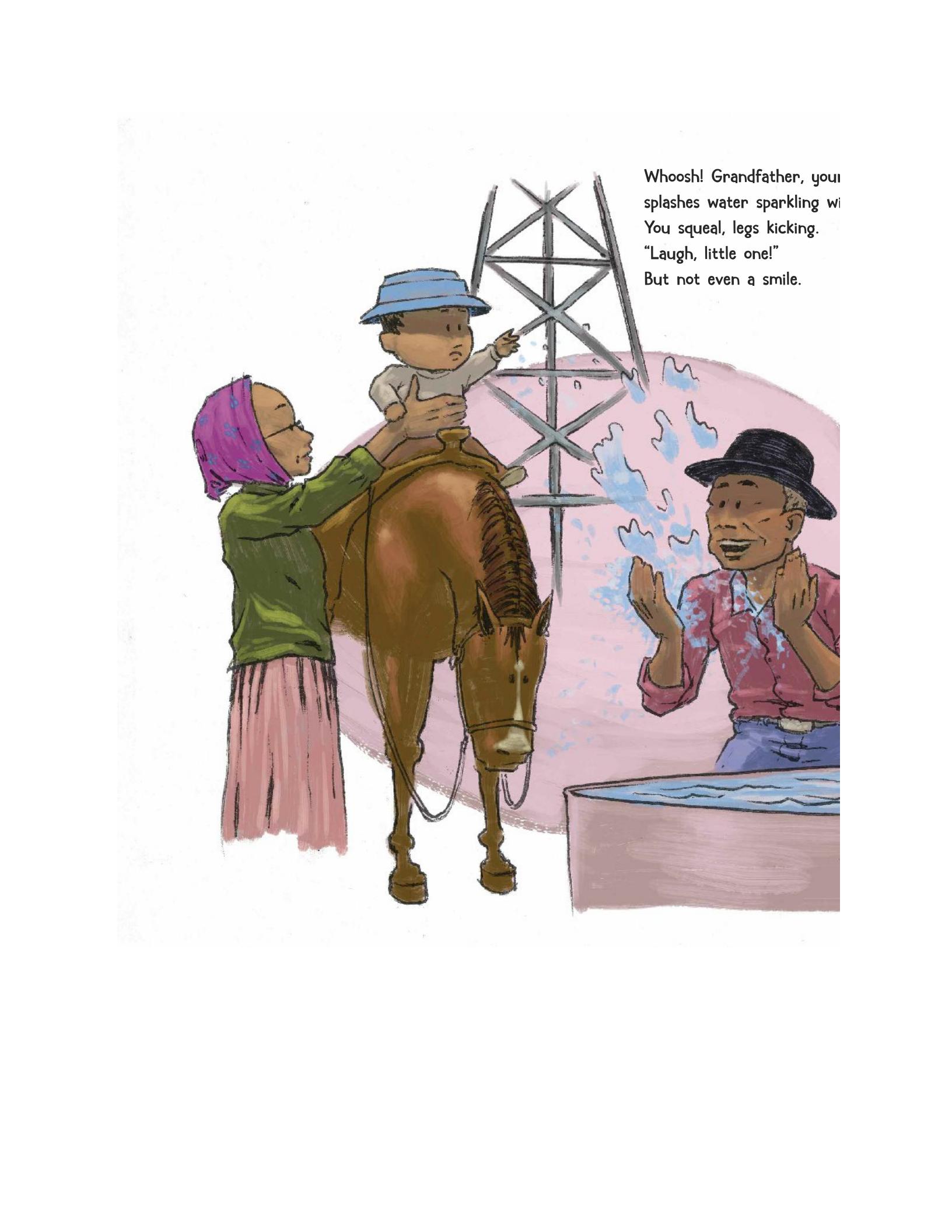




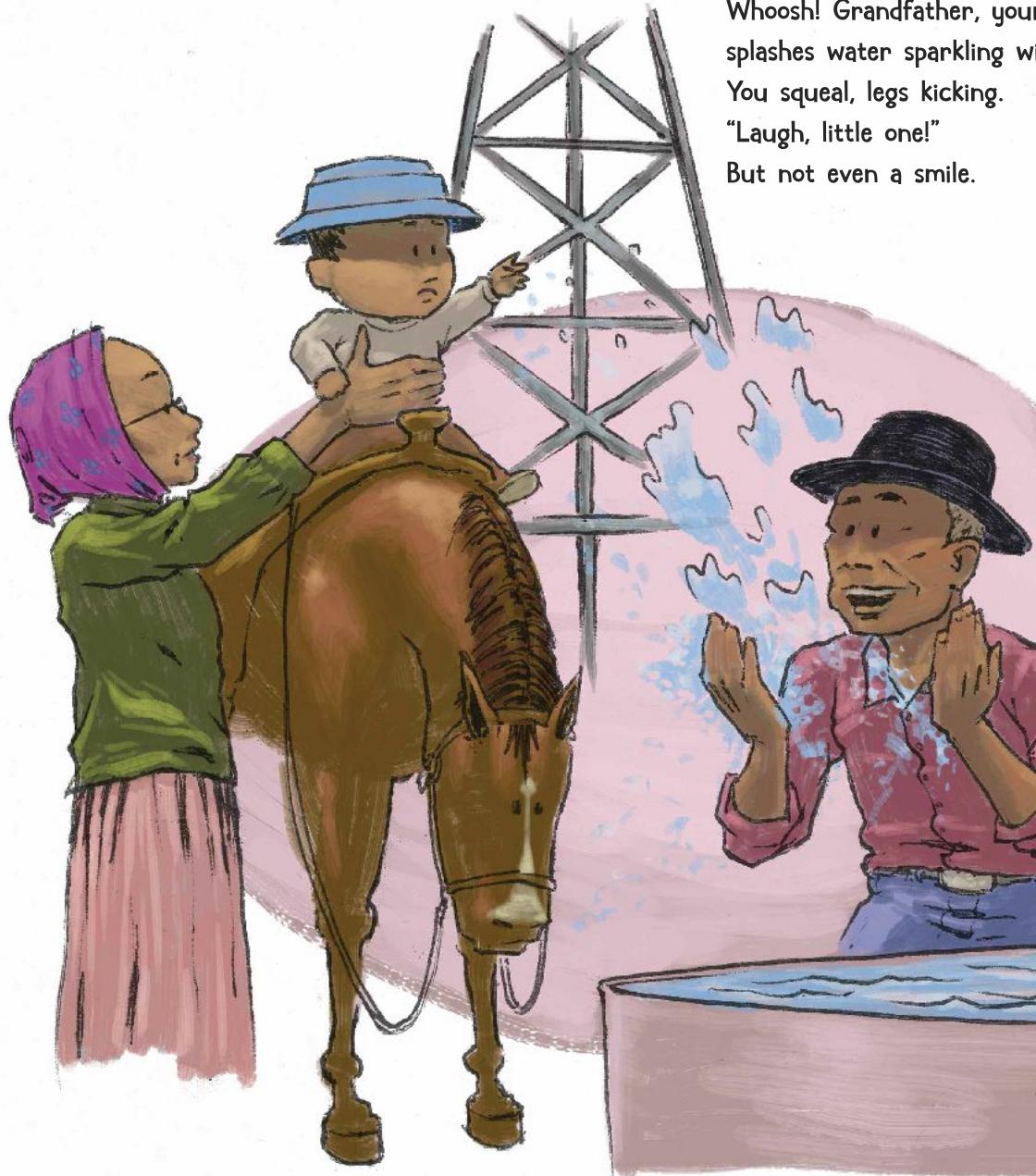
Your lips turn down—what a scowl!

Grandmother kisses your cheeks and tears.  
She points to the windmill  
bringing up water for cows and their calves.  
You reach toward the silver blades spinning.

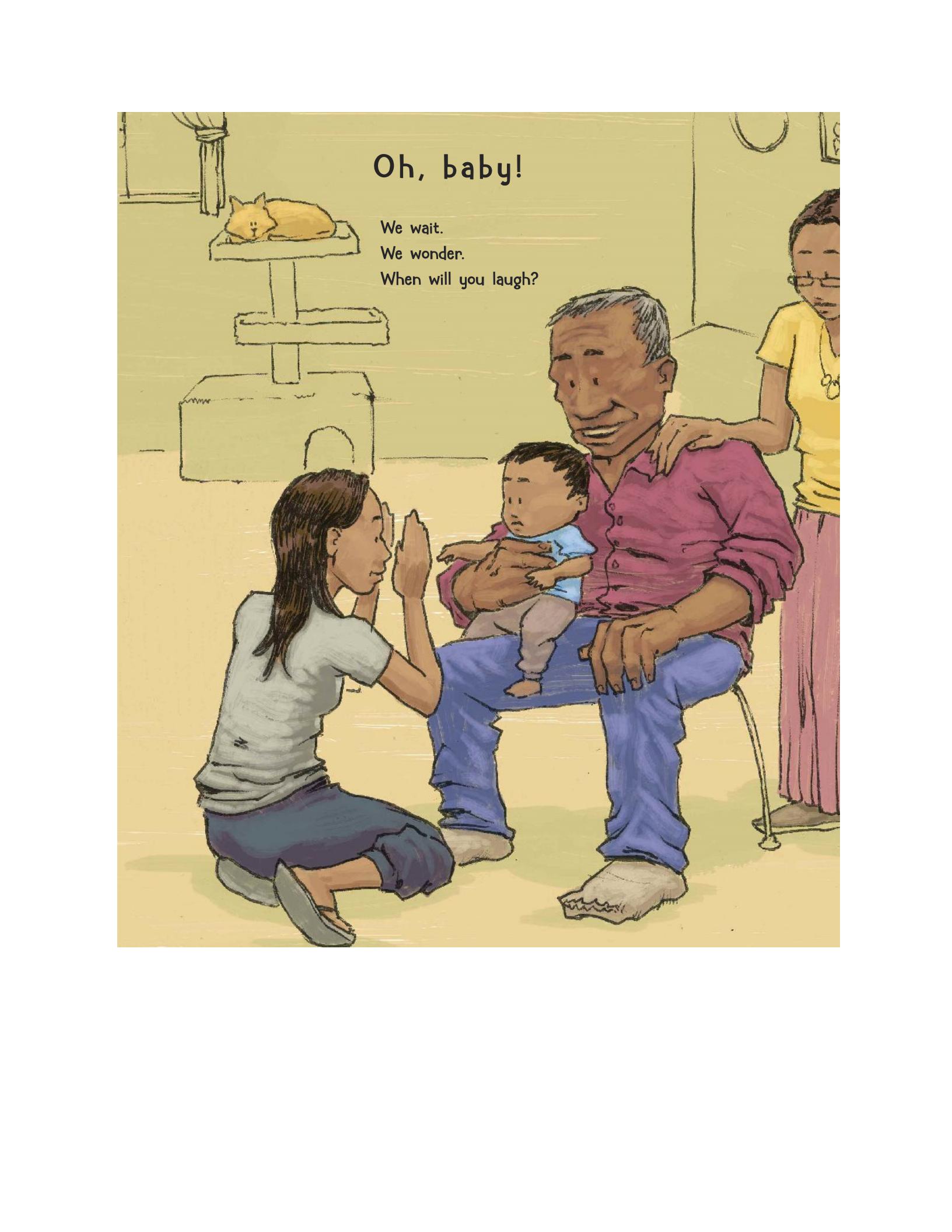




Whoosh! Grandfather, you  
splashes water sparkling wi  
You squeal, legs kicking.  
"Laugh, little one!"  
But not even a smile.



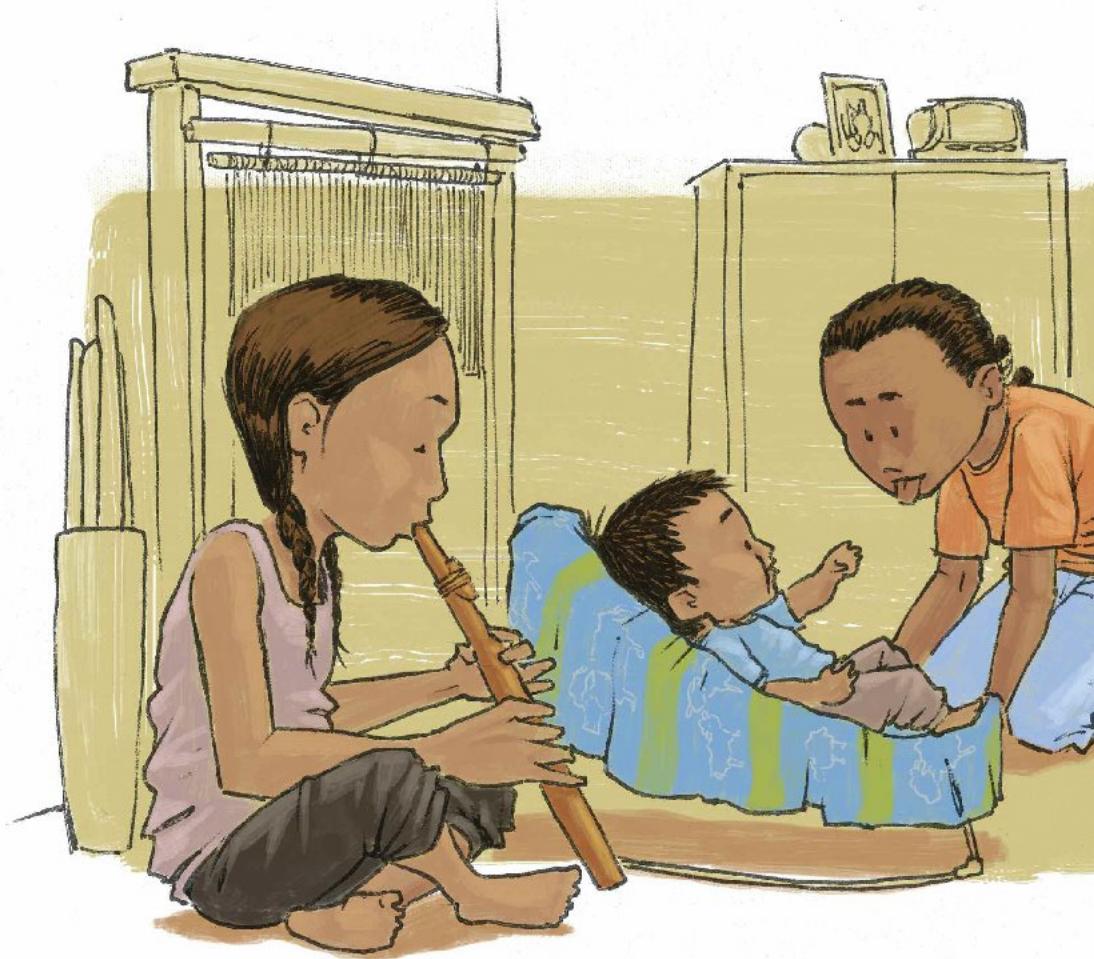


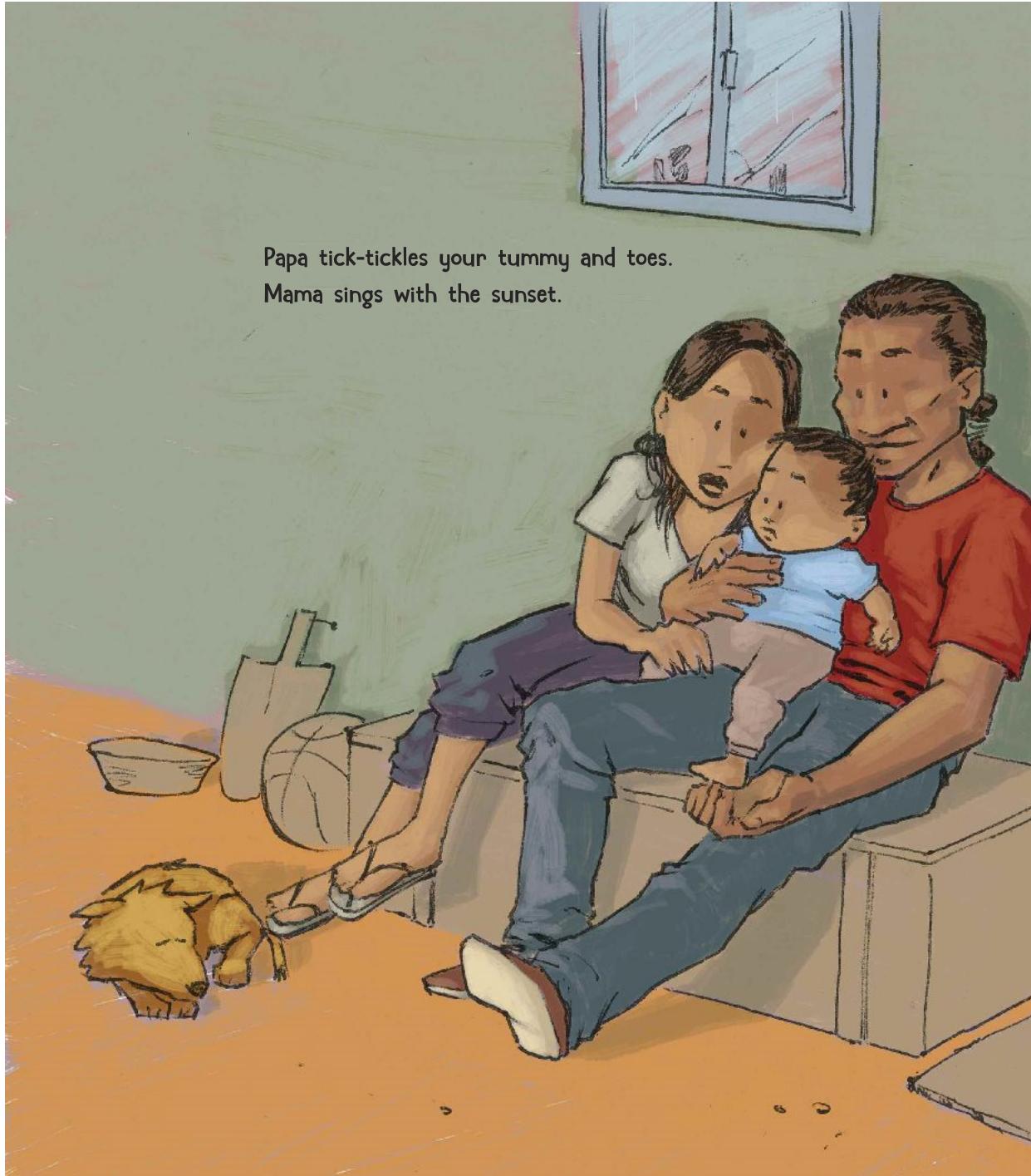


# Oh, baby!

We wait.  
We wonder.  
When will you laugh?

Tonight after napping, you wake, stretch, and look.  
Not tired. Not hungry. Not scared.  
Big brother, your *ninaai*, makes silly faces.  
Sister plays her Navajo flute.





Papa tick-tickles your tummy and toes.  
Mama sings with the sunset.

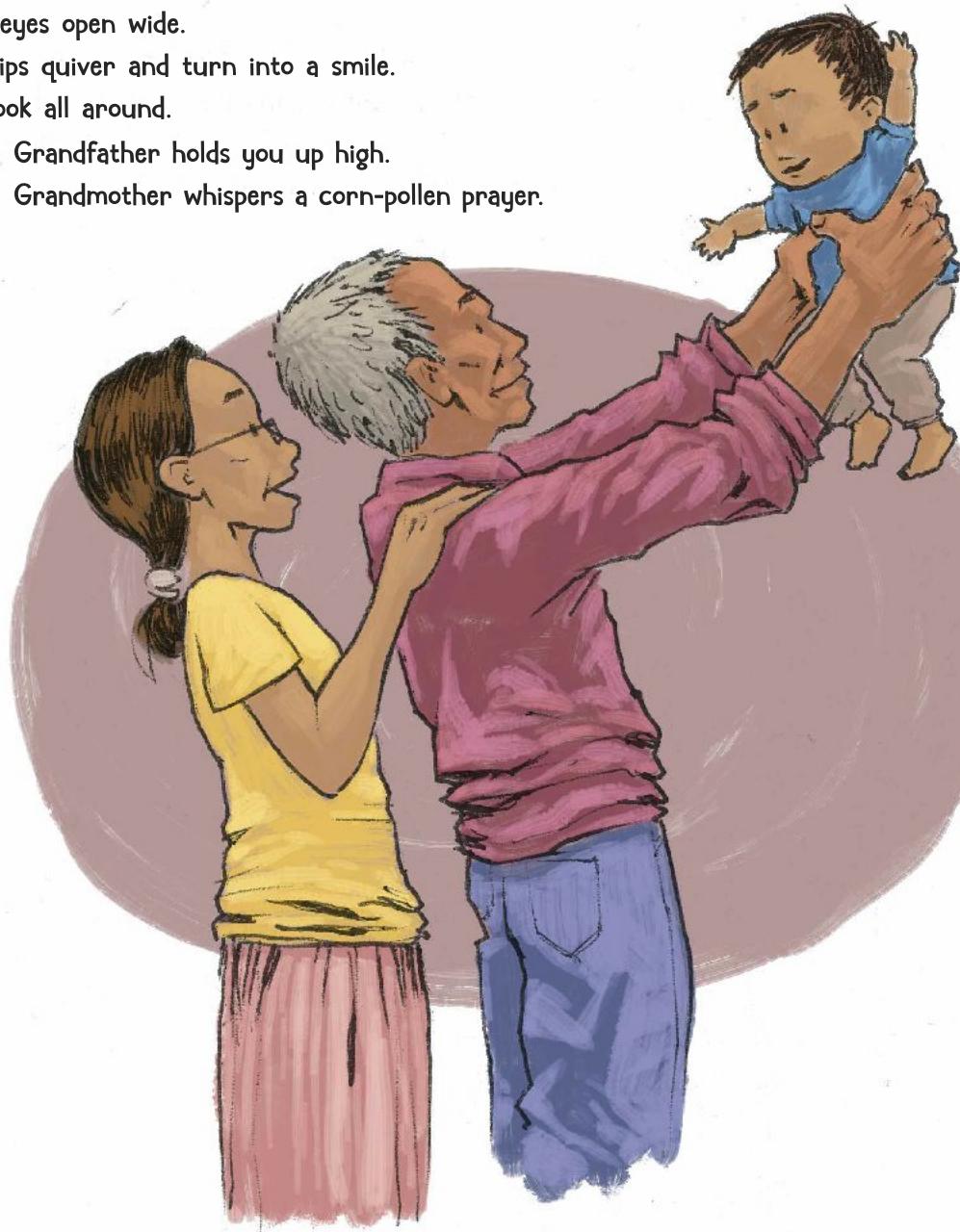
Your eyes open wide.

Tiny lips quiver and turn into a smile.

You look all around.

Grandfather holds you up high.

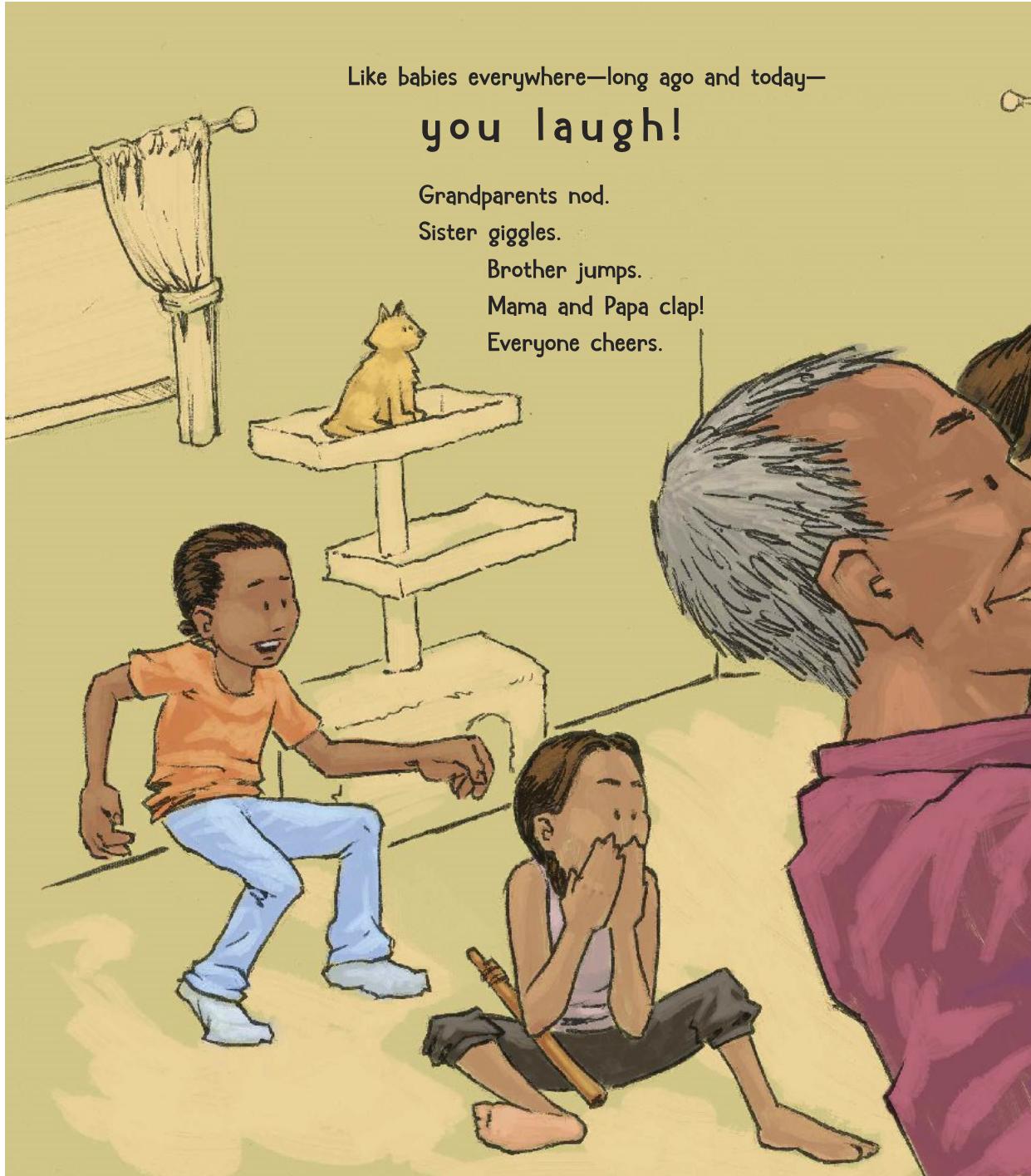
Grandmother whispers a corn-pollen prayer.



Oh, bab

Your arms w  
Your smile g  
Still bigger.





Like babies everywhere—long ago and today—

# you laugh!

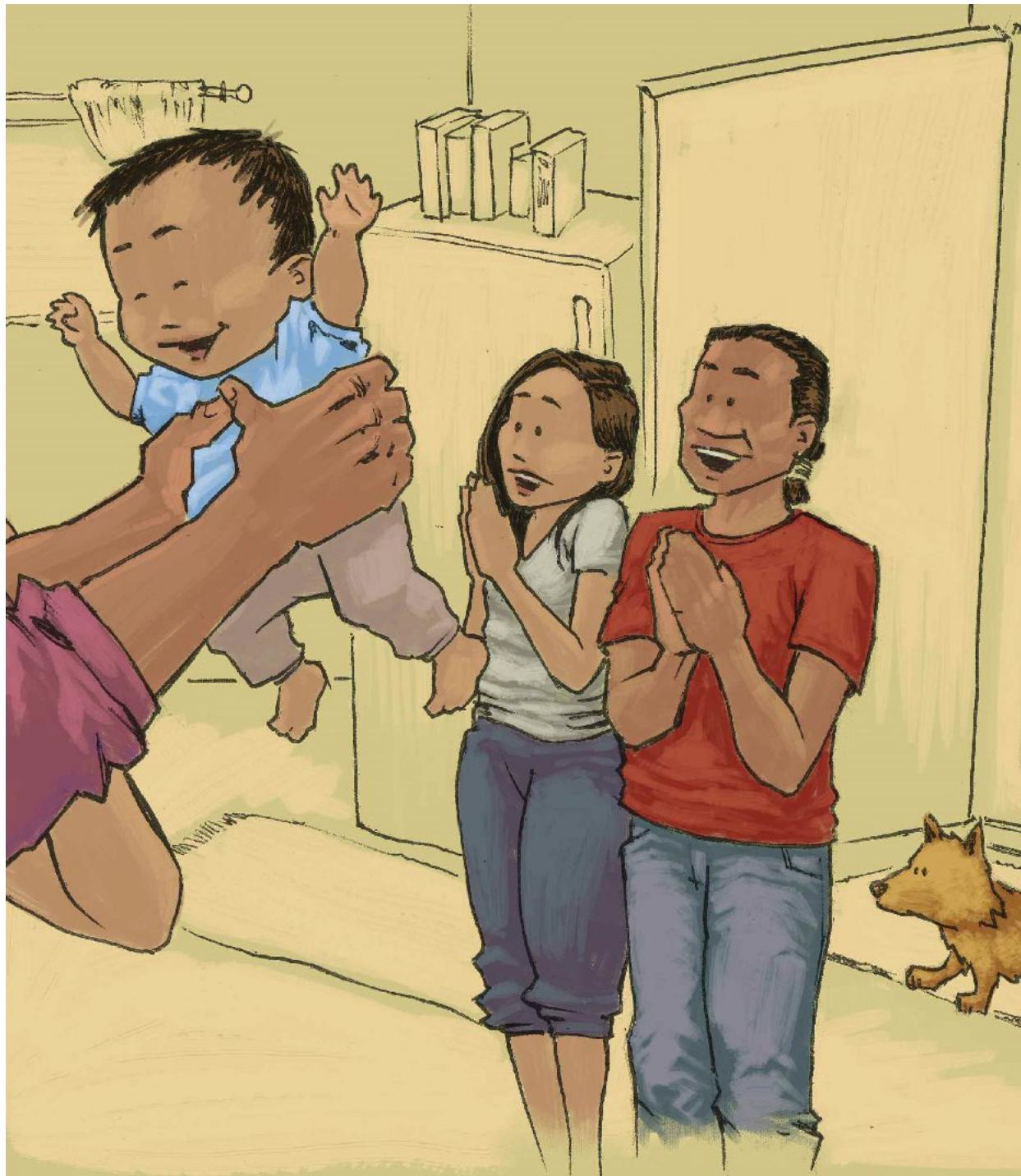
Grandparents nod.

Sister giggles.

Brother jumps.

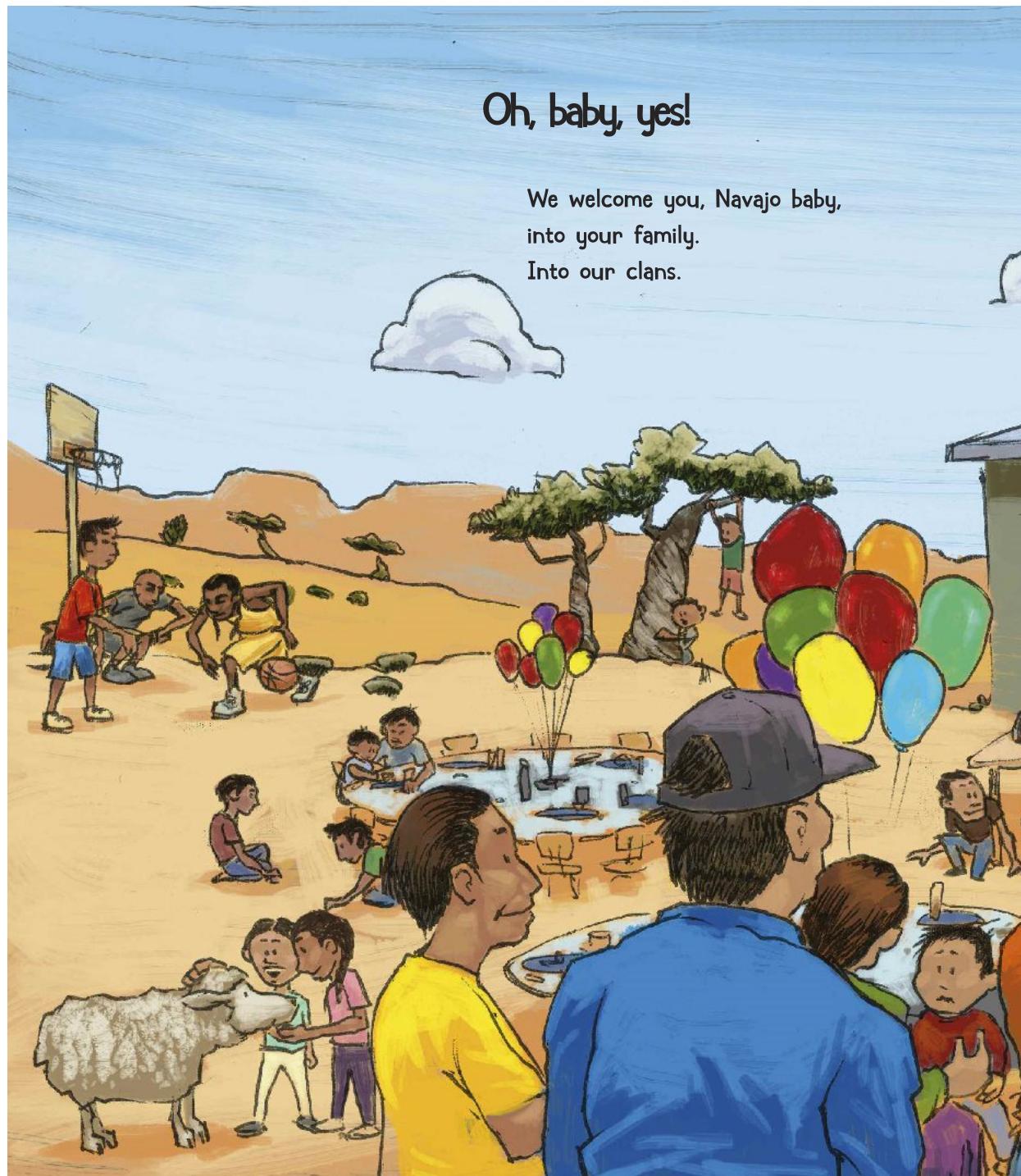
Mama and Papa clap!

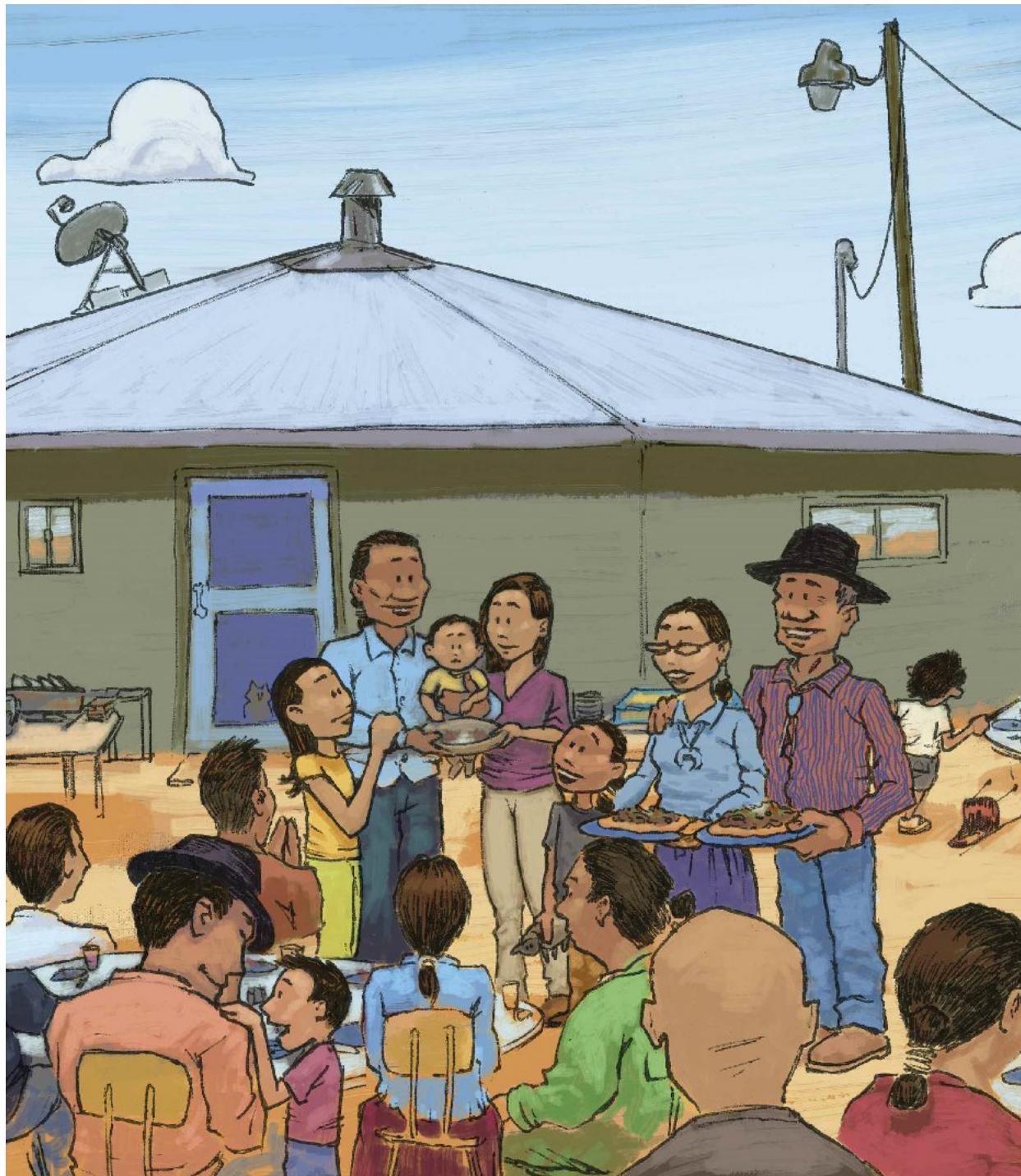
Everyone cheers.



Oh, baby, yes!

We welcome you, Navajo baby,  
into your family.  
Into our clans.





#### Author's Note from the Late Rose Ann Tahe

I'm from Many Farms, Arizona, Da'ak'ehalanidee' naasha. I am Navajo, Dine nish'li, and I will introduce myself in the traditional way: I am born into my mother's clan, the Red Running into the Water Clan (Naaneeshi Tachii'nii nish'li), born for my father's clan, Sa Clan (Ashiihi bashish'chiin). My maternal grandparents' clan is One Who Walks Around (Honighaanii dashichei) and my paternal grandparents' is Red Bottom Clan (Tl'aash'chi'i dashinali). This is who I am and where I am from.

#### Author's Note from Nancy Bo Flood

My memories of writing *First Laugh—Welcome Baby!* are full of joy. But there is also a sad part. Just weeks after Rose and I completed the manuscript for this book, she contracted a sudden illness that took her life. I asked her family what they wanted to do. They all agreed that their mother's wish was to have this book become real. Rose wanted to write about Navajo life for children—all children. I am grateful you can read Rose's words and learn about the beautiful way that the Navajo people welcome children into their families and clans.

#### Illustrator's Note from Jonathan Nelson

I am honored to be a part of this project. The timing is relevant in regards to my care and life. As a fairly new parent, I can attest to the joys and complexities of fatherhood. My experiences have only made me appreciate each day's conversations, play, and work. This project incorporates many facets of my work and life. The tangibles include pencil sketches, acrylic painting, and Photoshop to bring this wonderful story to life, which I hope many people will enjoy. The resiliency of the Diné begins with life and why it is worth fighting for. I have tried to portray that through my illustrations. Ahéhee'.

#### About the Settings in This Book

Like many Navajo families, some of the people in this baby's family live in the city and in the country. Native Americans live and work in many different places across the United States, and often spend time at their traditional homes, especially for family celebrations.

**The First Laugh Celebration** (La'tse Awee' ch'ideeldloh) is a Navajo, or Diné, tradition to a child's first formal welcome into a family and clans. The celebration expresses the parents' hope that their child will always be friendly, kind, and caring. Laughter is celebrated as an important, healthy, and healing aspect of the human spirit. Everyone in the family tries to be the first to make a new baby laugh. The person who succeeds begins a special relationship with the child and has the honor of hosting the First Laugh Ceremony. During the ceremony the baby holds (with some help) a woven Navajo basket filled with special salt crystals. Guests are given a pinch of salt to renew their good character. Giving away precious salt is the child's first act of sharing. As the baby grows, the family wishes that the child will have a happy life, many smiles, quick generosity, and a kind heart, and will gladly give to anyone in need.

#### Other Ceremonies

Families around the world celebrate the arrival of a new baby. Welcome rituals vary from culture to culture, but all connect the baby with family and community.

In **China**, when a baby is one month old, friends and family attend a *man yue* celebration. Eggs are boiled and dyed bright red, a very lucky color. The egg's shape symbolizes enjoying a happy, peaceful life. Long noodles are served in hope that the child lives a long life.

In **Japan**, many babies receive a blessing at a Shinto shrine when they are one month old. Later they attend a purification ceremony, the Seven-Five-Three Festival (*Shichi-Go-San*). All children who are three, boys who are five, and girls who are seven dress in traditional kimonos and are presented at a shrine. Evil spirits are chased away to invite a happy future. Children each receive a big bag of candy!

In **Australia**, when an Aboriginal newborn is five days old, the mother gathers in a secret place with other women—no men are allowed. The new infant is held over a sacred smoldering fire and purified in the smoke.

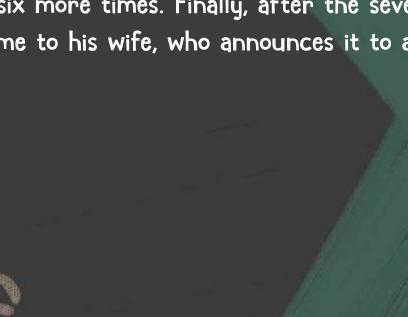


In many **Christian** religions, baptism is both a sacrament of purification (holy water washes away original sin) and an acknowledgment that the child is now a member of the church community.

In some **Hindu** families, people receive as many as sixteen purification ceremonies called *Sanskara*. One special ceremony, called *Jatakarma*, happens soon after birth. Honey and ghee (butter) is dabbed on the baby's tongue to help the child grow up healthy and clever, and the name of God is whispered into the baby's ear to welcome the newborn into God's family.

In **Muslim** families, infants are immediately welcomed into the community. A senior family member whispers the call to prayer in a newborn's ears. A bit of sweetness—sugar, softened dates, or honey—is rubbed into the baby's mouth. This ritual, the *Tahrik*, encourages the infant to begin sucking and expresses the parents' hope that the child will grow in "sweet kindness and obedience." Seven days later friends and family gather to celebrate *aquiqah*, the baby's naming.

In **Jewish Reform** and **Progressive** families, daughters and sons are welcomed with a naming ceremony at the synagogue. In **Orthodox** families, the father recites a blessing as his daughter is named on the first Sabbath after she's born. A newborn son is named at his circumcision ceremony.



In **Nigeria, Africa**, Edos families host a naming ceremony. During the ceremony, the eldest woman in the family asks, "What will you name your child?" The mother always replies with a terrible name. All the women shout "No!" The question and response are repeated six more times. Finally, after the seventh time, the father whispers the baby's actual name to his wife, who announces it to all.

In the western Pacific in Palau, family and friends gather a few weeks after a first baby is born to celebrate that both the baby and mother are doing well. At this celebration, the *Omengat* or *Ngasech*, the mother and child are formally presented. The mother wears a traditional grass skirt in the family colors. Her husband places a necklace of stone money around her neck. Mother and baby are welcomed as relatives chant, "the mother is alive and the baby is alive!"

Long ago, Greek people made cakes as offerings to the moon goddess, Artemis. The cakes were round like the full moon. Candles made them glow. And now, more than two thousand years later, many people around the world celebrate this way as a child grows. Dim the lights. Carry in a frosted cake with candles blazing. Everyone sings. Make a wish, take a deep breath, and blow!

#### Selected Sources

Jackson, Kathy Merlock. *Rituals and Patterns in Children's Lives*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.

Birth and Growing Up Celebrations. *World Book's Celebrations and Rituals Around the World*. Chicago: World Book, Inc., 2003.

To read more about any of these celebrations or ceremonies, you can use your favorite search engine online.





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Charlesbridge Publishing, Inc.  
Published by Charlesbridge, 85 Main Street, Watertown, MA 02472  
(617) 926-0329 · [www.charlesbridge.com](http://www.charlesbridge.com)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Names: Tahe, Rose Ann, author. | Flood, Nancy Bo, author. | Nelson, Jonathan  
(Illustrator), illustrator.  
Title: First laugh—welcome, baby! / Rose Ann Tahe and Nancy Bo Flood; illustrated  
by Jonathan Nelson.  
Description: Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, [2018] | Summary: A Navajo  
family welcomes a new baby into the family with love and ceremony, eagerly  
waiting for that first special laugh. Includes brief description of birth customs  
in different cultures. | Includes bibliographical references.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2017028982 (print) | LCCN 2017040719 (ebook) | ISBN  
9781632896193 (ebook) | ISBN 9781632896209 (ebook pdf) | ISBN  
9781580897945 (reinforced for library use)  
Subjects: LCSH: Birth customs—Juvenile fiction. | Infants—Juvenile fiction. |  
Navajo Indians—Juvenile fiction. | Families—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Childbirth—  
Fiction. | Babies—Fiction. | Navajo Indians—Fiction. | Indians of North  
America—Southwest, New—Fiction. | Family life—Fiction.  
Classification: LCC PZ7.1.T32 (ebook) | LCC PZ7.1.T32 Fi 2018 (print) | DDC  
[E]—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017028982>

In loving memory of Rose Ann Tahe.

To Linda Ross, Diné, traditional practitioner  
ordained minister. You give so freely to so many  
especially laughter and morning coffee.—N.

To Chris and Olin for bringing hózhó  
and making this nizhóní.—J. N.

Special thanks to the many librarians, especially Pamela H. Johnson, at the Arapahoe Libraries, Arapahoe County, Colorado, who found information for me from places as far away as Australia, Japan, and Edo, Nigeria. And to Rose Ann Tahe's family, who encouraged me to continue Rose's dream of creating books for Navajo children. To my daughters, Natalie and Tatum and Natalie, we will celebrate with lemon meringue pie at The Junction.—N. B. F.

Printed in China  
(hc) 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Illustrations Illustrations drawn with pencils and finished with ballpoint pen and  
Photoshop. Research included children's books, paintings, and photos.  
Display type set in Pinto  
Text type set in Digby  
Color separations by Colourscan Print Co Pte Ltd, Singapore  
Printed by 1010 Printing International Limited in Huizhou,  
Guangdong, China  
Production supervision by Brian G. Walker  
Designed by Susan Mallory Sherman